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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0385
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 8898
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 6273
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0247
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 7457
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 4504
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0941
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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 4376
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 6203
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0591
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 7119
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1887
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 1053
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 2368
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000464

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2019
TAGS: SNAR PREL
SUBJECT: RUMORS OF CORRUPTION IN BOLIVIAN COUNTERNARCOTICS POLICE

Classified By: EcoPol Counselor Brian Quigley for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) has received numerous reports from certain members of the Bolivian National Counternarcotics Police (FELCN) regarding alleged acts of corruption involving members of the GOB and the FELCN. While the NAS cannot conduct investigations to determine the legitimacy of these allegations, the allegations themselves point to a significant level of mistrust within the FELCN and between the FELCN and the Vice Ministry of Social Defense headed by Felipe Caceres. End Summary

¶2. (C) In February, Lt. Col. Cuevas (Strictly Protect), then finishing up his term as head of FELCN's Rural Patrol Unit (UMOPAR) in the Chapare region told NAS Police Advisor that Vice Minister of Social Defense Felipe Caceres asked to exchange three hundred kilos of cocaine HCl for three hundred kilos of coca paste (Note: UMOPAR had previously seized more than six hundred kilos of cocaine HCl in a Chapare checkpoint that would have been available at the time of the alleged encounter. End Note). In addition, Caceres offered to provide Cuevas with \$100,000 USD and "to be a friend for life". Cuevas responded that he had just been assigned to head the FELCN's jungle school and no longer had access to the drugs. Cuevas also said Caceres inquired into the well-being of the confidential informant (CI) that provided the information that led to the arrest of the Teran sisters and asked Cuevas if the CI was "still ok", one week later she was found stabbed to death (Note: Elva and Juana Teran, sisters of MAS Constitutional Assembly member Margarita Teran, were arrested in September 2008 with 147 kilos of cocaine. End Note). The head of the Vice Ministry of Social Defense, Felipe Caceres, is the Bolivian "Drug Czar" and is one of the longest serving Vice Ministers in the Morales administration.

¶3. (C) In March, FELCN Deputy Commander Felix Molina (Strictly Protect) told NAS officers that the head of FELCN's Special Coca Control Group (GECC) Lt. Col. Stanley Tintaya was involved in arranging the transportation of seized coca to drug producers, instead of destroying it. He said that

"Tintaya is the dirt underneath Caceres' fingernails". Molina said that FELCN Commander Oscar Nina was aware of this but was not confident that Nina would address the allegations as he is very close to Felipe Caceres. (Comment: NAS is looking into discrepancies between how much seized coca DIGCOIN reports having received from GECC for destruction and how much GECC seized. DIGCOIN reports having 877,000 lbs. in its warehouse, the same amount it reported at the end of 2008, in spite of GECC claiming to have seized 507,000 lbs to date in 2009. End Comment) Molina said he requested the reassignment of one person allegedly involved in the corruption and was pushing to have Tintaya replaced.

¶4. (C) In December 2008, rumors of corruption among FELCN officers in Santa Cruz's Viru Viru airport were widespread and NAS felt they were credible enough to request that then FELCN Commander Rene Sanabria rotate all officers at the airport. It was alleged that Capt. Ona, head of FELCN's airport unit and godson to Col. Sanabria, prevented FELCN Canine units from inspecting the luggage of specific international flights departing from Viru Viru. The Lieutenant in charge of the Canine group at the time submitted a formal complaint to his commanders which was ignored at the higher levels of FELCN. Col. Guido Frias (Strictly Protect), then head of the FELCN Canine unit, told NAS officers that drug traffickers paid specific FELCN officers between one-thousand to two-thousand dollars per kilo to allow certain bags to pass through the airport without inspection. Col. Frias claimed that Col. Sanabria was involved in the operation and was trying to raise money to "buy" the top position in the Bolivian National Police

(BNP) (Comment: Col. Frias maintained these allegations following the promotion of Sanabria to the number three position in the BNP claiming that then General Gemio would step down and that Sanabria was making payments to select MAS advisors to "buy" Gemio's position. Gemio was removed but Gen. Escobar was given the top position, appropriate as promotions are based on a point system and Gen. Escobar had more points than Col. Sanabria. End Comment). The current FELCN Commander in Santa Cruz, Col. Milton Sanchez, informed NAS that all FELCN personnel at Viru Viru were switched out. He also said that they had obtained photos of houses and cars purchased by several of the alleged participants that could not be afforded on a police salary.

¶5. (C) Allegations of corruption extend to CN prosecutors and specifically to their handling of seized assets. NAS received information that CN prosecutors in Santa Cruz, in coordination with FELCN officers, have returned seized assets to narcotraffickers in exchange for payment, underreported amounts of money seized during operations, and even sold seized livestock to make a profit.

¶6. (C) Comment: This cable does not include all rumors of corruption that have reached NAS but those that post feels are significant enough to report. Reported corruption also exists on a smaller scale, the most recent allegations involved UMOPAR police at Chapare checkpoints charging drivers a "fee" to allow illegal coca to pass through. At best the rumors and allegations indicate a significant lack of trust among FELCN officers and the GOB, at worst they indicate a serious corruption problem in Bolivia's CN program. This environment precedes the departure of DEA but will likely get worse as NAS is not able to investigate the allegations and more junior FELCN officers could be enticed into corruption. In most cases, FELCN police that are caught engaging in corrupt activities are simply transferred out of the FELCN, as in the UMOPAR case above, as there are no laws which allow for the investigation of unexplained assets in Bolivia. FELCN officers that are aware of the above incidents are hesitant to bring the allegations to light as they do not know how high up the corruption goes and are fearful of retribution from those involved. NAS will push FELCN to prosecute officers suspected of engaging in illicit activities and continue to monitor how the GOB responds to allegations of corruption in Bolivian CN units. End Comment.